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Viewing cable 08MANAGUA1088, NICARAGUA: CATHOLIC BISHOPS BREAK SILENCE, WARN

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Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#08MANAGUA1088**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
08MANAGUA1088	2008-08-22 15:59	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Managua

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-30/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2758456.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-30/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2758467.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-30/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2758468.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-30/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2758464.aspx>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/4103/la-embusa-y-el-gabinete-de-ortega>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/4104/d-rsquo-escoto-en-onu-ldquo-un-desafio-de-ortega-a-ee-uu-rdquo>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/4102/estrada-y-la-ldquo-doble-cara-rdquo-ante-ee-uu>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/3966/la-ldquo-injerencia-rdquo-de-ee-uu-en-el-2006>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-23/Mundo/Relacionados/Mundo2758764.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-23/Mundo/NotaPrincipal/Mundo2758753.aspx>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/4041/millones-de-dolares-sin-control-y-a-discrecion>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/4040/la-ldquo-injerencia-rdquo-de-venezuela-en-2006>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/4047/rodrigo-barreto-enviado-de-ldquo-vacaciones-rdquo>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-16/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2757239.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-16/Mundo/NotaPrincipal/Mundo2746658.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-16/Mundo/Relacionados/Mundo2757244.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-16/Mundo/Relacionados/Mundo2746673.aspx>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/3991/dra-yadira-centeno-desmiente-cable-diplomatico-eeuu>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/3968/pellas-pronostico-a-eeuu-victoria-de-ortega-en-2006>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/3967/barreto-era-ldquo-fuente-confiable-rdquo-para-eeuu>

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TO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3075
INFO RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUMIAAA/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL//J2/J3/J5// PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MANAGUA 001088

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR WHA/CEN SJUSTICE
DEPT FOR DRL GMAGGIO
DEPT FOR IRF ABORST
NSC FOR DFISK

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/21/2018
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KIRF](#) [NU](#)
SUBJECT: NICARAGUA: CATHOLIC BISHOPS BREAK SILENCE, WARN
OF 'DARKNESS AND DEATH'S SHADOW'

REF: MANAGUA 955

Classified By: DCM Richard Sanders for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

SUMMARY

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11. (C) In a pastoral letter released August 15, the Nicaraguan Episcopal Conference delivered a sharp critique of the Ortega government and put on record the Catholic Church's deep concern about the deteriorating conditions in the country. The letter also made a strong appeal to all Nicaraguans to participate in the November municipal elections and to refuse to succumb to indifference and apathy. Without denouncing President Daniel Ortega or any political party by name, the bishops warned ominously that the country was at risk of falling under the "shadows of darkness," authoritarianism, and corruption. After presenting the positive along with the more negative elements of the political panorama, the bishops stressed the importance of civic participation, government transparency, and preserving conditions for a free, fair, and democratic electoral process. Given the current leadership, they worry that Nicaragua will be more adversely affected by world problems than other countries. While the Church has sometimes been accused of influencing the political arena in violation of the secular state, this particular pronouncement was welcomed by voices across the political spectrum during a week in which the Ortega Administration and its minions outdid themselves insulting critics and opponents, and demonizing erstwhile allies. END SUMMARY

LIGHTS AND SHADOWS

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12. (SBU) To mark the traditional Catholic observance of the Feast of the Assumption on August 15, the Episcopal Conference of Nicaragua released a pastoral letter rebuking the government's administration of the nation's problems, particularly those affecting the poor. Warning of a "dangerous" return to authoritarianism and the disappearance of ethics in the political community, the bishops exhorted all Nicaraguans to remain engaged in the November municipal elections. Titled "Exhortation by the Nicaraguan Bishops before the Current Circumstances of the Country and the 2008 Municipal Elections," the bishops stressed they had a pastoral duty to their flock to speak from their faith and their heart, and not from a "cold" academic, economic, or political viewpoint. Careful to give credit where credit is due, the pastoral letter first acknowledged the few bright

spots on the horizon, notably the government's efforts to address social problems through free healthcare, education, and a housing project aimed at the most disadvantaged. The suspension of the energy crisis that had subjected the country to daily power outages, and improvements in highway repairs were also highlighted. On the other hand, warned the letter, there are currently conditions that could take the country into "darkness and the shadow of death" (Luke Ch.1, IV. 79). They worried that the "dangerous and dark shadow" of extreme poverty, hunger, cost of food, escalating oil prices, low wages, and other social factors were creating tensions that could generate intrafamily violence, abandonment of education, cultural stagnation, higher crime, narcotics trafficking, illegal land grabs, forced migration, and even armed conflict.

13. (SBU) Without mentioning Ortega by name, the letter rebuked the country's leadership and administration on multiple fronts. Lamenting the lack of "quality" in the current government, the bishops observed that the country was in the hands of a political system that favored individuals, groups in power, and partisan interests which was not only disheartening, but "detrimental to the common good." Furthermore, the lack of transparency in the management and distribution of foreign revenues had not only caused consternation and unease among the Nicaraguan people and the international donor community, it also signaled the "shadow of corruption."

BACK TO AUTHORITARIANISM

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14. (C) The pastoral letter was as much a wake up call to the public as a critique of the government's performance. The bishops deemed the government's intolerance of any criticism and dissent, closure of democratic spaces, and the deterioration of political pluralism as worrisome signs of a return to authoritarianism. They attributed current civic indifference and apathy toward the municipal elections and other forms of political participation in part to the replacement of an "ethical" political discourse to one full of "deception, insults...and even slander" and the government's systematic attempt to discredit adversaries. In their estimation, a political discourse of vulgarity, demagoguery, slander, fanaticism, and repression were conducive to dictatorship rather than an authentic democracy. Not all forms of criticism, disagreement, and diversity of opinions should be seen as an attempt "to destabilize the government," they admonished, and anyone who disagrees with the political party in power should not be "constantly" subjected to insults and recrimination. Reminding the public of the importance of free thought and expression, they also proclaimed that the freedom to one's opinion is a fundamental human right and a "manifestation of the health of a democratic society," contributing to transparency and good governance. (NOTE: During his homily on Sunday August 17 at Managua's Metropolitan Cathedral, parish priest Father Bismarck Conde reiterated that it was dangerous for the government to declare critics as "enemies," asserting that in Nicaragua there was a diversity of opinion, and not all Nicaraguans "think the same way." END NOTE.)

15. (SBU) The deterioration of social and economic stability was also enabling the installation of authoritarianism, warned the bishops. Instead of achieving peace and reconciliation, the country was becoming more polarized as a result of the confrontational and offensive political dialogue. The constantly negative, combative, and "violent" language, used by those in public office was fomenting class hatred and division, alienating foreign investment, and encouraging exclusion and repression, they observed. In the midst of this creeping "shadow of darkness," the bishops exhorted that now more than ever was the time for civic activism and election participation.

IMPORTANCE OF CIVIC PARTICIPATION

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¶6. (SBU) The bishops reiterated the importance of the citizenry and civic participation throughout the letter. Reminding Nicaraguans that their own constitution guarantees the right of "every citizen to vote and to be elected," the pastoral letter exhorted citizens to take responsibility and exercise this right rather than leave the outcome of the municipal elections in the "hands of one sector." Even when there were doubts about the transparency of the electoral process, citizens must persist with their vote in order to elect officials committed to the common good. They also made a call for lay persons and people of faith to become more involved in the political field, to promote a more "just order for society." It is important for citizens to have say in the political community, quoting Pope John Paul II, in order to select the best government officials and "to reject those lacking the moral ideals and ethical qualities to govern." According to the bishops, in the absence of proper leadership elected by the people through free and fair elections, the global crisis will have an even more detrimental effect on Nicaragua than on other countries.

¶7. (SBU) Under the heading "Commitment to Creating the Best Electoral Conditions, the pastoral letter then presented an outline for how the voters, candidates, election authorities, and the media each had a role and responsibility to preserve democracy through the electoral process. They appealed to voters to resist the fear of fraud, apathy, partisan fanaticism, instability, blackmail, disillusionment, and other factors that could adversely affect them at the voting booth. The also reminded them of their obligation to choose between "the bad and the good, between the good and the best." The bishops called upon candidates to avoid the "injustice" of putting partisan interests ahead of the good of the country, and to use language and conduct that

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demonstrates respect, moderation, realism, and integrity to ensure the elections are carried out as "an authentic democratic exercise." They specifically implored candidates to not "defraud" the electorate, to set aside their personal and partisan interests, and to focus their efforts on confronting the serious problems of poverty and hunger.

¶8. (SBU) Turning to the Supreme Electoral Council and other state institutions, the bishops reminded the authorities of their obligation to uphold the law and to guarantee a clean and transparent electoral process "based on the truth." "It is time to overcome the temptations that emerge from the shadows of evil and to bring to light the moral quality that lies within everyone," they counseled. The bishops also advised the media to uphold the truth and adhere to objective, professional standards given its influence and role in informing the public.

¶9. (SBU) The letter concluded asserting that the religious community also had been called upon to help create and watch over a favorable electoral climate and campaign. The bishops explained their pastoral duty was not to interfere in the political ambit, but to objectively mediate in preserving respect, mutual coexistence, honesty, justice, and peace for the people, and to carry out God's work. They closed with a prayer for the country asking for the divine intervention of St. Mary to remove the country from "the shadows of error." The letter never mentioned President Ortega nor any member of his administration by name. It was signed by the following bishops: Monsignor Leopoldo Brenes, Archbishop of Managua and President of the Episcopal Conference; Bernardo Hombach, Bishop of Granada and Vice President of the Episcopal Conference; Juan Abelardo Mata Guevera of Esteli, Socrates Rene Sandigo Jiron of Juigalpa, Bosco Vivas Robelo of Leon, Jorge Solorzano Perez of Matagalpa, Carlos Enrique Herrera Gutierrez of Jinotega, and Pablo Schmitz Simon and David

Zywiec Sidor both of Bluefields.

NO OFFICIAL COMMENT ON PASTORAL LETTER

10. (C) Although Daniel Ortega and his wife Rosario Murillo, who serves inter alia as Director of Communications and Citizenry, have been verbally sniping at and insulting their critics throughout the week, the FSLN political apparatus avoided responding directly to the pastoral letter. However, in a defensive speech delivered in Jinotega the same day the pastoral letter became public, President Ortega continued to lambaste those who comment negatively about his administration, seeking to disparage opponents for simply criticizing his governance rather than offering any concrete proposals for the country.

COMMENT

11. (C) Although the Nicaraguan Catholic hierarchy, particularly Monsignors Brenes and Hombach, have typically sought to maintain a distance from the political sphere (ref A.), the severity of this pastoral letter signals that the Church is no longer content to remain bystanders as the country careens from bad to worse with Ortega-Murillo at the helm. Some pundits have deemed the letter "prophetic." The significance of the municipal elections has compelled the top church leadership to weigh in before the outcome paradoxically paves the way for authoritarianism and greater polarization. The pastoral letter capped off a week of intense criticism by local media and outside observers against the various mishaps of President Ortega, most notably the remarks by former Mexican President Vicente Fox, Swedish Ambassador to Nicaragua Eva Zetterburg, and Paraguayan Minister for Women Gloria Rubin (septel). But while it has had few inhibitions in unleashing invective against its perceived adversaries, it will be difficult for the Ortega team to try to discredit the Catholic Church to its advantage.

CALLAHAN